

## Chapter 8 Theorizing Masculinities in Contemporary Britain

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This Chapter can be cited as follows:

Anderson, E., & McCormack, M. (2014). Theorising Masculinities in Contemporary Britain. In S. Roberts (Ed.). *Debating Modern Masculinities: Change, Continuity, Crisis?*

It seems that there is always a crisis in masculinity. Yet as Foster, Kimmel and Skelton (2001) highlight, the reason for the crisis always changes. Sometimes the crisis is that men are too hard and other times too soft. Our perspective is that the further masculinities transition away from the rigid homophobia of the 1980s, the more men benefit. Indeed, while scholars, journalists and even casual observers of contemporary British culture note that heterosexual masculinities are becoming broader, softer, and more inclusive of diversity, misinterpretations of men's gender as a whole still occur in academia. This chapter therefore asks two questions: First, what does the evidence say about the direction in which British masculinities are moving? Second, how does our theoretical understanding of masculinities both shape our findings, and evolve in relation to a changing culture? Thus, we provide a partial history of masculinity theory and contextualize the chapters of this edited volume, in order to advance theoretical and empirical understanding of British masculinities.

### **There is No Crisis in Masculinity**

Contemporary Britain is undergoing a positive transformation regarding masculinity. Today's men, particularly younger generations, eschew the homophobia and hyper-masculinity of their fathers. They are physically and emotionally closer to each other, taking pride in their softer versions of self (McCormack 2012). Indeed, the 1990s concept of the well-dressed metrosexual has gained traction for men outside of metropolitan areas (Anderson 2014). Key to this social change is the social inclusion of gay men: Where homosexuality was once exceptionally stigmatised, today it is the expression of homophobia that will result in censure. We readily accept that there are significant issues in contemporary British culture, and that many young men fall victim to the social and economic policies of austerity as discussed by some of the contributors to this book—but the crisis here is one of class inequality (Atkinson, Roberts and Savage 2012), not gender.

Instead of a crisis of masculinity, British male youth are essentially better dressed digital hippies. They have grown up with less interest in religion and soldiering, exploring their identities and developing a sense of their sexual and gendered selves on the internet. They have gay friends, and resolve problems through talking instead of fighting. Their ability to express emotion, to hug and even cuddle other men (Anderson and McCormack 2014) are signs of progressive social change rather than a social problem. Of course, to argue for a social trend is not to suggest that *all* British youth in all geographical locations adhere to such dynamics; but this recognition should not obscure the broader empirical reality of the benefits of contemporary masculinities.

The chapters in this book support the rejection of a crisis narrative of masculinity. The overarching theme is one of masculine change; from an orthodox to a softer, more inclusive

perspective. Even though the challenges, tensions and remnants of yesterday's hegemony persist in context-specific arenas, these chapters confirm the thesis that matters are improving. One may disagree about the extent of the progress, but there is no evidence that culture is stagnant or that masculinities are becoming more violent, homophobic or misogynistic. Indeed, it is not just our research that documents the positive transition, but an increasing number of scholars in a diverse range of settings in the UK (e.g. Cashmore and Cleland 2012; Dashper 2012; Jarvis 2013; Roberts 2013).

The chapters in this book present data from small groups of sub-cultural men: men who mosh to heavy metal music, counter-cultural Emos in the Welsh Valleys, middle-aged-to-older gay men, and straight men who take their makeup seriously. They are not the everyday, middle-class men in our ethnographies (e.g. Anderson 2009; McCormack 2012). That the improvements discussed above are occurring even at these edges of evidenced-based research provides further verification of the broader social trend that is most visible with, but clearly not limited to, middle-class boys and men (see also McCormack 2014a).

Exemplifying this, Riches' chapter, with data collected in Canada, documents the tenderness and emotional caretaking of men who violently thrash their bodies into other men in a heavy metal-mosh pit. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Simpson discusses the lived-experience of middle-aged-to-older, mostly single, gay men. His participants spoke of moving freely within public spaces and making claims to individual civic freedoms, even stating that hetero-spaces provided freedom of association they found lacking in gay male culture. He documented how these men could be themselves in hetero-spaces, liberated from what they perceived to be the competitive, sexualized scrutiny of an ageist, body-obsessed commercial gay scene.

Simpson also highlights how age colours experiences of gender and sexuality. Plummer (2010) has developed this idea more fully with his notion of generational sexualities. Indeed, in a recent study of bisexual men's coming out experiences, we argue that there is a generational cohort effect not only in how friends and family react to participants' coming out, but also in the gendered behaviours and sexual attitudes of the bisexual men studied—with the youngest cohort eschewing the heteronormativity of the older generations (McCormack, Anderson and Adams 2014). Thus, just as argued in *Inclusive Masculinity* (Anderson 2009), changing masculinities are influenced by age, with inclusive masculinities being most prevalent among – but not limited to – young men.

Simpson shows that his gay participants continue with the self-censorship they learned in their adolescence, rather than being policed by any systematic or culturally endorsed intolerance. This speaks to the complexity of how decreasing homophobia maps onto people's lives (Monro and Richardson 2012), but it does not address the attitudes or behaviours of heterosexual male youth. Indeed, Simpson admits to feeling jealousy and internalized homophobia when he reads about these changes as an older gay academic: The suspicion and envy with which both Simpson and some of his participants view younger men who express more openness about their sexuality is an effect of personal biography, and not homophobia of the younger generation.

The inclusive behaviours of heterosexual men are also overly-critiqued in Ingram and Waller's chapter on masculinities at two universities. Ingram and Waller first recognize a cultural shift in masculinities: their data finds that young men want to be “fit, though neither strong nor hard”, and all participants reject violence and aggression. They care about physical

appearance, appreciate the softer masculinity of David Beckham and esteem a “strong muscular body”, but Ingram and Waller highlight that class differences exist in the idealized forms of masculinity. These class differences are unsurprising, yet their claim that such differences represent a form of masculine domination perpetuates the crisis of masculinities discourse that Ingram and Waller seek to contest.

In arguing that the differences in masculinities are evidence of middle-class men’s domination of the working class men, it is surprising that there is *no empirical evidence* of domination, marginalization or aggression. All we are told is that middle-class men state that they mitigate “bad behaviour” through “ironic laddishness”. Ingram and Waller define ironic laddishness as a “form of boundary drawing that defies challenge yet enables unacceptable practices” (p.xx). It is impossible to know the social dynamics of this without definitions and examples of both “bad behaviour” and “unacceptable practices”, but it is problematic for Ingram and Waller to contend that their middle class participants “maintained dominance” and lacked a “genuine engagement in the erosion of inequalities” when they provide no empirical evidence to support their claims.

In addition to this, we are struck by the similarities between ironic laddishness and what we have called *ironic heterosexual recuperation* (McCormack and Anderson 2010a). This is a way for straight youth to identify as heterosexual without being homophobic (c.f. Mac an Ghaill 1994), and it is one component of a broader set of practices called *heterosexual recuperation*. McCormack (2012, p. 91) defined this as a “boundary-making activity, consolidating heterosexual masculinities and potentially esteeming heterosexuality in the process”. In other words, it is a way of maintaining an identity without marginalizing others. This may well be a better interpretation of the participants in Ingram and Waller’s study, particularly given the lack of evidence of oppression or marginalization. Thus, the limit of what can be claimed from their chapter is that different levels of privilege exist between social classes.

Given the nature of social class, it might seem self-evident to suggest that different class groups have access to different forms of social capital, but the leap to gender domination is problematic and seems to underplay the centrality of class in these dynamics (Lehmann 2013). We suggest that this is the result of a flawed grasp of the relevant gender theories. For this reason, we now turn to competing understandings of masculinities before we return to discuss their chapter and the remaining three chapters of the book.

## **Hegemonic Masculinity Theory**

Devised by Raewyn Connell, hegemonic masculinity theory (HMT) has been the key way of thinking about masculinities since the 1980s. While some call hegemonic masculinity a concept, we refer to it as a theory because it maintains predictive power. In the 1980s, HMT replaced the then-leading heurism, sex role theory with a more dynamic conceptualization of gender (Connell 1987, 1995). HMT conceptualized men’s hierarchies as configurations of practice, in order to accomplish its inter-related goals, of: 1) understanding the social dynamics of men (their social organization and behaviours); and 2) understanding how these dynamics reproduced patriarchy.

The original power and continued endurance of HMT comes from the fact that it was a very effective theory in understanding the social dynamics of men in the 1980s and early 1990s. The 1980s marked an apex of homophobic attitudes in the Western world (Loftus 2001).

General Social Survey data from 1988 documents that 81.8% of American respondents indicated homosexual sex was always or almost always wrong, an increase from the 1970s. Gay men were overtly stigmatized by mainstream society. It is the historical and cultural specificity of this time—specifically the exceptional levels of homophobia in Anglo-American cultures—which made HMT particularly suited to understanding the social organization of stratified masculinities (Grindstaff and West 2011).

Connell describes hegemonic masculinity as “...the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy” (Connell 1995:77). Implicit in this definition is that it is the configuration of gender practices of *men* that is being considered. While some scholars contend that because Connell discusses gender regimes and highlights that gender is relational, HMT is thus about men and women, it is notable that HMT is used overwhelmingly to understand the practices of men. Thus, a model for understanding the stratification of masculinities among men through a Gramscian-inspired hierarchical modelling has resulted from Connell’s theory, as well as an understanding of the policing of men’s individual gendered behaviours. Connell suggested that the social ordering was inscribed through physical domination or threat thereof, and discursive marginalization such as homophobic discourse (Connell 1995, 66-67). This was thought to ultimately reproduce or at least promote patriarchy.

Connell (1995) designated three categories of masculinities that emerge ‘under’ the hegemonic form: complicit, subordinated and marginalized. Although Connell does not discuss this hierarchy explicitly, she alludes to it by suggesting that complicit masculinities keep the dominant form of masculinity in power because they aspire to attain or at least mimic it; the “subordination of nonhegemonic masculinities” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; p. 846) also implies a hierarchical structure.

Marginalized masculinities are said to categorize men oppressed by the hegemonic form of masculinity because of their race or class, and Connell (1995:80) distinguished them from “relations internal to the gender order.” Finally, highlighting homosexual oppression as distinct, Connell labels the masculinities of gay men as “subordinated,” suggesting they were “subordinated to straight men by an array of quite material practices” (p. 78). The stress on *material* practices seems to focus on overt forms of homophobia, rather than the implicit privileging of heterosexuality. These categories provided an effective framework for understanding the hierarchical stratification of men in Western society in the 1980s and 1990s.

Western homophobia of the 1980s is attributable to the rise of moralistic right wing politics, the politicization of evangelical religion, and the AIDS crisis (Loftus 2001; McCormack and Anderson 2014). Crucially, because the social perception of homosexuality is determined by behavioural actions and social identifications, rather than ascribed characteristics (in the way that skin colour socially identifies ‘race’), heterosexuality had to be continually proved and reproved. This meant that young men of this generation went to great lengths to avoid being socially perceived as gay (Mac an Ghaill 1994). They deployed homophobia against those who violated requisite gender norms, and esteemed masculinities remained within narrow gender boundaries that precluded emotional intimacy and physical tactility (Epstein 1997; Goodey 1997). This zeitgeist required homophobic attitudes and aggressive behaviours (Plummer 1999) if young men were to approximate the hegemonic form of masculinity and distance themselves from being thought gay.

Connell also envisioned the social organization of these loosely defined categories of masculinity as a structural mechanism for the reproduction of patriarchy, even though there is scant empirical evidence or conceptual logic to support this position (Grindstaff and West 2011). New (2001), for example, suggests that patriarchy is much more complicated than Connell suggests. Indeed, HMT offers a one-dimensional answer to the complex problem of patriarchy that has multiple social roots (Bourdieu 2001; Walby 2011), and this is why almost all sociologists utilizing HMT have looked solely at the intra-masculine stratifications.

When considering masculine hierarchies, it is vital to recognise that HMT is not, as some of the contributors to this book posit, a simple application of hegemony theory to men's behaviours; neither is it the existence of hegemony within groups of men. Indeed, Howson (2006) argues that Connell's understanding of hegemony is predicated on it being an oppressive and dominating form of social control. Howson (2006, p. 42) writes that "notwithstanding the various descriptive shifts, the theme that persists and is, in effect, threaded through the understanding of hegemony in the theory of practices is *domination*." Similarly, Flood (2002) has critiqued HMT as being about domination by definition, and Howson (2006, p. 154) demonstrates that for Connell, "hegemony and social justice are mutually exclusive socio-cultural phenomena".

So if we are to use HMT to understand the social dynamics of British men, we need to focus on the intra-masculine stratifications present among them. We need to examine who has hegemonic, *dominating* power—not just social privilege—and how others emulate that power to be like them. We need to understand the experiences of men through a framework of subordination and oppression. Yet, if one examines closely the data from the chapters in this book, there is no evidence of hegemonic dominance at play. But without the hegemony of the subordinated men seeking to be like the dominant group, and without the processes of marginalization and domination, HMT is not an effective heuristic tool and we need new ways to understand the social stratification of men.

### **Inclusive Masculinity Theory**

Inclusive masculinity theory (IMT) has developed from a number of research projects spanning almost ten years and tens of research sites. It came from the position that HMT had been a useful way of understanding masculinities in the 1980s and 1990s—including our own experiences at school. Anderson (2000) experienced extreme homophobia when he became America's first openly gay sports coach. Yet in his research on gay athletes, Anderson (2002) found that their experiences challenged HMT—they were more positive than he expected or HMT predicted. Further research on heterosexual college athlete's years later confounded the assumptions of machismo and homophobia among male youth as well (Anderson 2005). Anderson began to realize that the high level of homophobia of the period were historically situated and contingent on a number of social factors. In order to understand the intersection of masculinities and homophobia, he realized a theory was required that could account for decreasing levels of homophobia.

It is the concept 'homohysteria' that enables analysis of changing levels of homophobia in IMT. Homohysteria is defined as a 'homosexually-panicked culture in which suspicion [of homosexuality] permeates' (Anderson 2011, p. 7), and has also been described as the social fear of being socially perceived as gay (Anderson 2009). In order for a culture of homohysteria to exist, three social factors must coincide: 1) the mass cultural awareness that homosexuality exists as a static sexual orientation within a significant portion of the

population; 2) a cultural zeitgeist of disapproval towards homosexuality; 3) cultural disapproval of femininity in men or masculinity in women, as they are associated with homosexuality (see McCormack and Anderson 2014 for an extensive discussion of the concept). Homohysteria is fundamental to IMT, and enables both an historical and a context-specific analysis of masculinities.

In highly homohysterical cultures, boys and men go to great lengths to demonstrate they are heterosexual. In other words, they must prove that they are not gay. This is done through distancing themselves from things perceived as gay or feminine (because of its conflation with homosexuality for males). Thus, they eschew feminized terrains, behaviours and emotional expressions (Goodey 1997); they buff up or support sport teams in lieu of their own physicality (Plummer 1999); they talk in explicitly sexual and misogynistic language (Thurlow 2001); they avoid feminine entertainment choices, clothes or sports (Francis 1999); and they adopt homophobic attitudes and marginalize those suspected of being gay (Epstein 1997). It is this last characteristic that is most effective in securing masculinity because the greatest fear is being thought of gay.

However, as homophobia declines, the stigma associated with homosexuality also reduces. This has the effect that boys and men care less about whether they are socially perceived as gay. Thus, as homohysteria decreases, and boys and men are less motivated to avoid a ‘gay’ identity, homophobia loses its power to regulate masculinities. And in the absence of this policing mechanism, males are permitted to engage in a wider range of behaviours without ridicule. This will include choices of clothes, expressions of friendship and emotional intimacy, hobbies and pastimes, and with whom one chooses to be friends. As straight boys become friends with gay peers, they further undo their homophobia—a process McCormack (2012: 63) describes as a “virtuous circle of decreasing homophobia and expanded gendered behaviors”.

Examining many of the populations studied in this book, we see them existing in a culture free of or with only low homohysteria. Simpson documents middle-aged-to-older gay men finding freedom in hetero-spaces, but it seems that young people are particularly free to pursue their own interests. Gough and Hall show that young straight men wear makeup; Ingram and Waller find that their participants distance themselves from homophobia and can embrace a range of masculinities “without any tension or contradiction” (p. ); and Ward documents that a gay peer was out in the Welsh Valleys—while this youth experienced some homophobia, it seems to be nothing like the level that was documented in the 1980s and 1990s (O’Leary 2004; Weeks 2007). We see no hegemonic stratification in any of these findings, and we argue that there is no strict masculine hierarchy—instead there exists a non-vertical clustering of masculinity types.

### **Evidencing Decreasing Homohysteria**

Our arguments about the changing nature of masculinities rest on the notion that homohysteria is decreasing in contemporary culture. The chapters support this contention. Cann uses two sets of sex-integrated group interviews to explore what younger teens from a low socio-economic class in one British city say they think about masculinity. While Cann shows these young men’s social script is one that valorises heterosexuality and physicality (Richardson 2010), these youth were also “keen to present themselves as accepting” of homosexuality. It seems that they were heterosexist, but we question whether such implicit, structural privilege really amounts to the domination required of in Connell’s model—

something particularly difficult to estimate in the absence of data on interactions with sexual minority peers.

Discussing desire for heterosexuality enters tricky terrain. As two gay men, we are very happy to be gay and do not wish to be heterosexual, yet we would reject a label of homosexist. Of course, when the desire for heterosexuality exists in a culture which still privileges heterosexuality in a number of ways, proclamations of heterosexuality need to be treated more critically—but they must also be balanced carefully in recognition that most people have a heterosexual orientation and want to live in coupled relationships rooted in sexual desire. In other words, wanting to be seen as heterosexual is not, in itself, heterosexist. It has to be accompanied by a belief that heterosexuality is better than other sexual orientations. We did not see particular evidence of that with the boys in Cann's study.

It is also important to recall that while Cann's interviews tell us something important about surface-level presentations of masculinity, they do not speak beyond the presentation of self. Without participant observations, or individual in-depth interviews, little can be said about their behaviours, peer interactions, or whether they actually follow the scripts they discuss in focus groups. Cann has not witnessed homosocial interactions, peer group formations, or other important aspects of inclusive masculinity in settings that we have seen because of our ethnographic methodology (Anderson 2009, 2014; McCormack 2012). And just as we are told that we know obscenity when we see it, there is something about the tactility and openness of heterosexual male youth that has to be seen to be believed. For those readers that do not have access to such a research site, go to a university club at a weekend, or watch an episode of *Hollyoaks*, or even just scroll through some Facebook profiles of young straight men for evidence.

Cann's discussion of the distancing from violence and aggressive behaviour is still significant, however. Cann writes,

Thus, rather than being *aspirational*, as hegemonic masculinity theory contends, the boys instead use it as a reference point against which they produce their own less 'masculine' masculinities. This therefore complicates the linearity of hegemonic masculinity, but nevertheless demonstrates its discursive persistence.

This is similar to Wetherell and Edley's (1999) argument, but it extends it by showing that the archetype of hegemonic masculinity exists only as a cultural reference point; gleaned in particular from a fascination with 1980s films, which are almost certainly viewed with a mixture of irony, enjoyment and homage. Williams (1977) might have called this the residual elements of a previously hegemonic discourse. Or it can perhaps also be understood as cultural lag, in that the culture of youthful masculinities has moved away from previous ideas of masculinities, but a lag exists in recognizing the orthodox ways of men from a previous generation.

Perhaps the most illustrative component of Cann's research comes through a discussion of the American TV show, *Glee*. In her mixed-sex group interviews, it was girls who regulated the boys' gendered behaviours. Conspicuously absent in the conversation were boys regulating their own gender. Rather, they said that association with femininity was acceptable among close friends, but that it was not something to be broadcast. Whether this was because of the girls' gender policing is unclear, but similar regulation was discussed (again, only by women) with tastes in music. Thus, conclusions about how boys feel about these shows can

only be that they did not object to Glee, or feminized music, enough to speak up and homosexualize boys who do – it was the girls involved in the project that attempted to police masculinities.

The most significant evidence for the erosion of homophobia comes with Gough and Hall's chapter. While avoiding debates about masculinities theory, Gough and Hall nonetheless highlight that, "we can no longer rely on social structures and grand narratives to furnish us with stable identities; rather, individuals have become responsible for designing their bodies and, by extension, their identities." This contention seems entirely reasonable, and it resonates with broader sociological arguments about the ways in which sexual identity has become a project of the (individualized) self (Giddens 1992; Waskul 2003).

Gough and Hall's argument supports the notion that individual masculinities are no longer firmly rooted in social structures like the church, military or industry, but instead see men becoming the individual managers of their own identities. This would further support our contention that broader economic changes maintain less relevance for masculinities (see McCormack 2012), as the location of gendered meaning shifts from industry and the role of the state to the individual. Indeed, Gough and Hall argue that this provides "a chance to re-imagine what it means to be a man, letting go of anachronistic, outmoded aspects of masculinity...while developing hitherto neglected and traditionally feminised qualities". We agree, and further posit that as the metrosexual broke free from the strictures of homophobia and orthodox masculinity, young heterosexual men had more space to engage in behaviours that once would have been used to marginalize them. We concur that this social change is still deserving of further research, particularly on how these micro-level changes intersect with other macro changes beyond that of decreasing homophobia.

Simpson, on the other hand, appears to be experiencing cognitive dissonance with the notion of decreasing homophobia. We see that much of his own data supports IMT, but his own socialization into a homophobic culture in the 1980s makes him somewhat homophobic and envious. While he recognises this in his chapter, it still clouds his intellectual judgement: Despite studying middle-aged-to-older gay men, and not teenagers or undergraduates, he nonetheless concludes that IMT overstates younger men's tolerance of homosexuality. This conclusion speaks beyond the data of his sample. Sadly, his desire to prove IMT wrong overshadows his interesting findings regarding how older gay men navigate increased social liberty despite being products of a homophobic culture. It becomes clear that the old rules of extreme homophobia they grew up with exist more in their patterns of thought than they do in society.

### **Responding to Criticism of Inclusive Masculinity**

The productive theoretical tensions in this book have helpfully highlighted some of the complexities of changing masculinities in contemporary British culture. However, there are also some misconceptions related to IMT that we address now.

We begin with Ingram and Waller's contention that IMT maintains that masculinity types will retain *equal* social value. This is incorrect. Instead, the theory posits that there will be *no hegemonic form* of masculinity, but that some forms will be more popular than others (see McCormack 2011a). That is, the middle-class and working-class men can esteem different masculinities without one maintaining hegemony over the other. Some of these masculinities may well be more popular than others, and working-class men may encounter a range of



issues in university settings and social life more broadly that will not affect middle-class students (Lehmann 2013); however, this does not equate to a problem of masculinities, but of social class.

We contend that Ingram and Waller's misreading comes from having only engaged partially with the theory. In reading their chapter, it becomes apparent that they have only read Anderson's (2005) article on male cheerleaders. Despite citing his book where the theory is developed (Anderson 2009), they refer solely to his research on male cheerleading teams to argue that "what Anderson's data shows is that the context is highly specific in regulating and determining the forms of masculinity that are sanctioned" (p. xx). It is surprising, then, that they pay no attention to the four other, multi-site studies that he uses to develop the theory in his book (Anderson 2009). Similarly, if they had more than just cited other research that uses the theory (e.g. Adams 2011) or engaged with McCormack's work in a range of settings (e.g. McCormack 2012; McCormack and Anderson 2010b; McCormack, Anderson and Adams 2014), they would have recognised the diversity of research sites—including interviews with men outside of institutional settings (e.g. Anderson, Adams and Rivers 2012; McCormack, Anderson and Adams 2014). Indeed, we are somewhat sceptical of their critique about context when they see no issue in their own data, drawn as it is from "a small number of male student focus groups" (p. ) from two universities in one city.

More significantly, their argument that IMT elides social context is only sustainable by their own erasure of homophobia. By ignoring the central concept of IMT, it is unsurprising they do not find contextual nuance—they are excluding the heuristic tool that enables such an examination. Homophobia can be considered a sensitizing concept, "the key factor in determining the type of social environment" (McCormack 2011b, p. 673), and no serious engagement with the theory can ignore it. We refer Ingram and Waller to our extended discussion of the concept in *Sex Roles* (McCormack and Anderson 2014).

It is this partial understanding of IMT, we suggest, that leads them to draw on Messner's (1993) limited discussion of masculinities in the United States to understand contemporary British male youth, over 20 years later. This is despite these masculinities conforming to the behaviours and attitudes that we would label as 'orthodox' and occurring in dynamics of high homophobia. We thus suggest that their arguments would be more powerful if they had engaged with the growing body of scholars who have discussed changing masculinities in this millennium, and from this country (e.g. Dashper 2012; Jarvis 2013; McCormack and Anderson 2010a; Roberts 2013).

It is also important to recognise that the social trend of diminished homophobia will not be the same across all areas of the UK. Ward, for example, highlights the complexity and problems faced by a small number of young men in a particularly insulated community—a subcultural group within a small village in the Valleys region of south Wales—documenting the experiences of alienation and marginalization that occur with this particular group of boys. His work is thus important in highlighting the forms that alienation takes in particular communities, and for contesting the dominant political discourse that this is a crisis in masculinity rather than a complex intersection of multiple socio-political issues.

We take issue, however, with his claim that this contradicts "recent work that suggests that all young men are changing or have the ability to change" (p. xx). This seems predicated on a misreading of the literature on inclusive masculinities, ignoring the explicit recognition that decreasing homophobia is an uneven social process and that changing masculinities are

dependent on a range of factors. Indeed, we have separately highlighted how class acts as a buffer on the development of inclusive behaviours (McCormack 2014a), and how some inclusive men still valorise competitiveness, sport, and other attributes of orthodox masculinity (Anderson 2009).

We are more concerned, though, by the assertion that some young men do not have “the ability to change”. This implies that the men in Ward’s study have not changed, and we remain unconvinced that this is the case, particularly in the absence of discussion about the other groups of men and given the presence of an openly gay student. More significantly, the argument that some youth are not *able* to change contradicts the sociological tenets of how critical scholars conceive of society. Of course, recent social policy developments in the broader context of imposed austerity have likely impeded the development of inclusive attitudes, but a framing of the impossibility of change is deeply problematic, and will not aid the public discourses around these youth or the potential for positive social policy interventions which are most clearly needed (Hearn 2010).

Finally, we are deeply uncomfortable with Simpson’s extended and emotional discussion of *The Declining Significance of Homophobia*. There is not the space to engage with all the critiques, but some egregious claims demand a response. For example, Simpson’s contention that IMT states that “the problem [of homophobia] lies less with heterosexuals and more with young LGBT people” and views “the critical voices of gay youth...as false consciousness” is unfounded. To argue for a diversity of LGBT voices to be heard in scholarly work (see McCormack 2014b; McCormack, Adams and Anderson 2013) is not to blame the victim as Simpson implies, and to portray our methodological arguments in such a way is an attempt to stifle academic debate. Secondly, Simpson’s critique of the openly gay student president who talks about sex with his peers is a form of slut-shaming which promotes a sexually conservative future for gay youth, and must be rejected. Thirdly, Simpson’s implication that McCormack suggests working-class people form an underclass is baseless and pernicious. Finally, the central tenet of Simpson’s chapter – that IMT ignores the influence of age – is undermined by our recent article that documents a generational cohort effect on the experiences of bisexual men aged between 18 and 42 (McCormack, Anderson and Adams 2014).

### **The Future of British Masculinity**

Evidence presented in this book about the changing nature of masculinities is supported by a wealth of other research projects on British men (e.g. Anderson, Adams and Rivers 2012; Cashmore and Cleland 2012; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2012; Roberts 2013). Collectively, these studies demonstrate that whereas masculinity used to best be defined as a particular, conservative type of orthodox masculinity, men can no longer be stereotyped. To assume men to be homophobic, stoic, or emotionally or physically alienated from other men is to pre-judge them. If the future of mainstream British masculinity rests with middle-class white men (those invested with the most cultural capital and power) then masculinities of tomorrow will likely broadly reflect what these young men value today. This means that they will express love to one another, engage in homosocial tactility, value social fluidity and their gay male peers. We are hesitant to make predictions about the future, particularly given the increasingly puritan discourses around porn and sex work, but there is little evidence at the current time of a retrenchment of softer masculinities in the UK.

Not all will like this prediction. Some will argue that homophobia has not decreased, but that it has merely changed forms. To this there is the undoubted truth that homophobia has become so unpopular that where it manifests, it mostly does so in covert ways. But this is evidence of the change in itself. Social movements take time, and antipathy toward the minority group dissipates slowly, unevenly, and generally moves from overt, to covert, to implicit, and then (hopefully) non-existent. Evidencing the shift, youth today label particular practices homophobic what older scholars would call heteronormativity (McCormack 2012). Also, those that argue that it is purely a middle-class phenomenon are choosing to ignore the research that documents a softening of masculinity among working class youth as well (McCormack 2014a; Roberts 2013). And, as Simpson states disparagingly, we *do* think that heteronormativity is less damaging than overt forms of homophobia—and given the horrors of overt homophobia in particular African and Middle Eastern countries, as well as in Russia, we find it bizarre that any scholar would claim otherwise.

Others may argue that we are cherry-picking data; that we take limited evidence and generalize it to the whole. These detractors will likely be wedded to a victimization framework of homosexuality, finding an example of homophobia or macho behaviour to argue against the broader social trend (see Moller 2007). It is worth, here, considering the psychological concept the availability heuristic (Tversky and Kahneman 1973), which speaks to the ease by which we recall information. It holds that more memorable examples are privileged over more mundane ones. The availability heuristic goes some way to explaining why scholars and politicians often overly-focus on particularly negative or horrific examples rather than the everyday experiences of young men (Jackson and Scott 2010). Supporting our application of the availability heuristic, no research contradicts the wide-spread positive changes that have occurred for young straight men in contemporary times. Heterosexual men are not that awful anymore. The future of gay, straight and other masculinities in Britain is thus likely one of still increasing inclusion of difference, alongside expanding gendered terrains. If this is a crisis, we support it.

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